

Re-appraising the Admiral's Men  
Shakespeare Association of America 2016 New Orleans

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Kuhn: responding to Brown and Skura

Skura: responding to Hamilton and Kuhn

Recovering John Singer's Extemporal Clowning for the  
Admiral's Men: Re-appraising the A-Text of *Doctor Faustus*

Bob Hornback, Oglethorpe University

When Christopher Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus* sometime between 1588 and 1593, and when we find its first record of performance by the Admiral's Men in 1594, clowning practice had been defined by the several improvisatory clowns of the Queen's Men. This earlier company had of course been the most successful from its formation in 1583 until 1592 but it was one for whom "print culture" was not a good match," as Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean have demonstrated. Interestingly, one performer attached to both companies was the stage clown John Singer, one of just a handful of famous Elizabethan clowns. He had joined the Admiral's Men as a

sharer and star performer second only to Edward Alleyn in September of 1594. Singer then remained with the company until his retirement by 1603, and thus certainly performed in *Doctor Faustus* as it appeared in the repertory of Admiral's between 1594-7 and 1600-1602, that is, in the so-called A-Text of the play. In the latter year, the play and (particularly) the clowning were revised and the changes are extant in the so-called B-Text. Singer can therefore be associated only with the early text, casting light upon the A-Text's famous clown scenes, which are anomalous in Marlowe's work. Unfortunately, Singer's reputation has not fared well among modern duopolist scholars. He tends to be treated dismissively as Shakespearean clown "[Will] Kemp's opposite number" and was even referenced recently by Richard Preiss among "lesser-known comedians such as John Singer." In much the same way, the critical tradition has long judged the scenes of clowning in the A-Text to be so different and defective in style compared to Marlowe's main plot as to represent either textual "corruption" or the work of some unknown, less skilled "collaborator(s)" responsible only "for the scenes of comic horseplay." Notably, Charles Nicholl characterizes the clown's scenes as containing merely "a welter of witless knockabout," and editor Sylvan Barnet believes the clown scenes serve only as distractions that regrettably "trivialize Faustus." Elsewhere, taking his cue from the neoclassical aesthete Hamlet, Preiss similarly conceives improvising clowns of the period generally as capable only of "disrupt[ing] the poet's designs," since "clowning splintered the theatrical program into an array of minor, evanescent forms that could not be reconciled to the play" as something he assumes aimed for "vocalic unity" as an "aesthetic artifact" with "integrity" that clowns inherently destroyed.

In order to consider more nuanced possibilities, I want to return these comic scenes to their context in Elizabethan stage clown practices, particularly those specific to the Admiral's Men. What was the relationship of professional stage clowns to play texts? Do the scenes reflect a norm of clowning improvisation, especially in light of evidence that Singer was, as I will argue, noted for a house style of "planned improvisation"? Was the extemporal wit of clowns described by Hamlet in a rival company's play as speaking more than was "set down for them" truly mere digressive inconsequence, intended only to evoke cheap laughter while distracting from "some necessary question of the play" (Hamlet 3.2. 38 ff.)? As I hope to demonstrate, great improvisers, like those recorded in the *Faustus* A-Text, were capable of much more

than mere distraction. The claim in Tamburlaine's preface in print that "poets" left "clownage" to paid professional improvisers, as well as evidence in Rose playhouse records, stage directions in Admiral's texts, Singer's repertoire, and marked traces of orality, I argue, suggest that the clown scenes in the A-Text, which survives from a period of extraordinary advances in stenography occurring between 1588 and 1602, were both improvised and well planned. As such, these clown scenes were highly effective comically and in terms of the dynamics of a still largely oral popular culture, and they also had the capacity to amplify—in a dialogic or even polyphonic rather than "univocal" way—"necessary question[s] of the play" in *Doctor Faustus*.

## Why Did Chaucer Cross the Road?

Misha Teramura, Harvard University

This paper considers the triptych of Chaucerian adaptations produced by the Admiral's Men during the short period in which the Rose stood across Maid's Lane from the Chamberlain's Men's Globe—namely, "Troilus and Cressida" (finished May 1599), *Patient Grissil* (finished January 1600), and "Fair Constance of Rome" (finished June 1600)—and their resonance with Shakespeare's own *Troilus and Cressida*, written shortly thereafter. While this reportorial mirroring is representative of the larger pattern that Roslyn L. Knutson has shown preoccupied the two companies during this period, my argument is that the Admiral's plays foregrounded a set of critical issues at stake in adapting Chaucer for the stage, issues to which Shakespeare would acerbically respond. Chaucer was widely revered as the father figure of English literature, a reputation consolidated by the 1598 publication of Thomas Speght's extravagant folio edition of his *Workes*. The narrative sources of the Admiral's triptych—*Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Clerk's Tale*, and *The Man of Law's Tale*—represent Chaucer as his most self-consciously canonical and in Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton's *Patient Grissil* (the only extant play in the sequence) the playwrights allegorize the politics of adapting literary authority for the stage through two characters unparalleled in the play's Chaucerian narrative: Griselda's brother Laureo and the family's servant Babulo. Building off the work of Tom Rutter, I argue that Laureo not only represents Jonsonian laureate authorship, but also functions as

Chaucer's Clerk inserted into his own Tale, embodying both the character of the penurious scholar of Oxenford as well as the fantasy of Petrarchan laureation that links him with Chaucer. In contrast, the prolix, improvisatory Babulo represents the unliterary—perhaps anti-literary—energies of theatre. In the confrontations between these two characters, the play performs a psychomachia of the theoretical extremes implicit in Chaucerian adaptation. To conclude, I'll sketch some implications this might have for our reading of Shakespeare's Chaucerian adaptation *Troilus and Cressida*.

## The Theatrical Patronage of Lord Admiral Charles Howard: Three Issues

Paul White, Purdue University

Late bloomer, power dresser, intimate of Queen Elizabeth, and a national military hero outliving four—and nearly five—English monarchs, Charles Howard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Effingham, would appear to be a biographer's dream. And yet only one book-length study, Robert Kenny's *Elizabeth's Admiral: The Political Career of Charles Howard Earl of Nottingham* has been published, and that was fifty years ago. Every serious student of Elizabethan drama knows his name, but the only extended discussion of his theatrical patronage, to my knowledge, is the fifteen or so pages Andrew Gurr folds into his book chapter on "Privy Councilors as Theatre Patrons," published in 2002. In taking a fresh look at Howard's patronage, I want to address three questions that current scholarship holds significant to understanding Effingham's sponsorship of the Admiral's company post-1585 and his theatre-related views and actions while serving on the Privy Council in late Elizabethan England.

Those questions/issues are as follows. 1) What role did Charles Howard play in the formation and early history of the Queen's Men in 1583-5, especially in light of that formation's setting a precedent for the Crown's (and more specifically the privy council's) intervention in theatrical affairs over the next two decades? 2) My second question: what do we know about Howard's patronage of Edward Alleyn and his brother John Alleyn? I want to suggest that Howard's connections with the Alleyn brothers may date back to the seventies, possibly earlier, and that the company's

repertory, especially in the early years with Alleyn as their star, reflects their titular patron's interests. 3) Finally, apart from Queen Elizabeth herself, Howard was the most powerful theatre patron in England during the critical decade of the 1590s, and this is especially evident in the years following the death of his father-in-law and the long-serving Lord Chamberlain, Henry Hunsdon, in June 1596. But how powerful *was* the most powerful court patron during the decade of the so-called "duopoly"?

## Teamwork in the Admiral's Men: A Quantitative Assessment of Composition, Casting and Biography.

Paul Brown, De Montfort University

It took a group of people working together to stage a play. We often don't know, and it is difficult to learn, just how efficiently, theatre professionals worked together in play production. One way to try to recapture this is by creating doubling charts for a company's plays. Doubling charts have been used sporadically by scholars to estimate company size or to support evidence of perceived 'thematic' doubling in which an element of shared meaning, rather than mere practicality, shaped the casting choice. They can also serve as evidence for the casting efficiency of a script. A well-run company, we might suppose, would not waste resources on additional actors when others were standing idle off stage, but failure to minimize its casting requirements might merely indicate that a script had not yet been optimized for doubling. We may reasonably assume, however, that adult companies did not pay for additional hired men in small roles that might easily be eliminated by judicious doubling.

An examination of a company's extant plays for their casting requirements could lead to a better understanding of how well that company functioned collectively. To begin such a study for the Admiral's men, this paper takes several plays as case studies. Although they won't necessarily be representative of other extant plays, they should serve as a useful starting point for considering how well the company optimized its casting. It might be possible to observe patterns. Are co-authored plays more or less efficient than sole-authored plays in the optimization of cast size? Is there evidence to suggest that casting and doubling were non-authorial

refinements to a script? And, beyond the Admiral's men, what might this say about the casting of plays as a whole?

## Re-appraising the Admiral's Men: What Can We Learn from Anthony Munday?

Donna B. Hamilton, University of Maryland

Considering how we might describe the place and contributions of Anthony Munday, this paper cuts crosswise into the issues with which we deal when we work directly on or in relationship to the Admiral's Men. The paper considers the intersecting roles of religious and political contexts, censorship, playing company styles, collaborative writing, translations, manuscripts and print, patronage, and employment—as they affected Munday and his career.

Breaking down the barriers that old assumptions have erected opens the way to fresh assessments, but one that may need to go playwright by playwright and into territory other than the playhouse or playing company before we can arrive at larger generalizations.

## Stage Suicides & Pagan Heavens: Marlovian Eschatology and the Repertory System

John Kuhn, Columbia University

This paper is excerpted from one of the chapters of my dissertation, entitled *Making Pagans: Non-Abrahamic Religions & Theatrical Practice from Marlowe to Southerne*. The larger project argues that the material practices of the early modern theater, particularly the repertory system's tendency toward material conservatism and the recycling of performance forms, played a shaping role in the construction of ideas about radical religious difference. In this chapter, I look at what I call scenes of "reunion suicide," in which multiple subordinates instantly kill themselves after a loved (usually royal) pagan authority figure dies, citing their desire to meet them in a

reconstituted royal family in the afterlife. I trace this trope, which became extremely widespread in early modern English theater, to Marlowe's early work in *Tamburlaine I & II* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. I show how dramatists who followed Marlowe in working for The Admiral's Men and the Children of the Chapel borrowed and elaborated on his "follower" suicides in the five years after *Tamburlaine*. In doing so, these dramatists ascribed a religious belief--that of a primarily anthropocentric, Elysian fields-style afterlife--to diverse sites around the ancient Mediterranean, putting the dream of meeting again, Zabina-style, in the mouths of ancient British kings, Scythian princesses, and Carthaginian royalty and thus turning a theatrical technique into ethnographic "knowledge" for audiences through repetition and recontextualization

## Nocturnals in the Admiral's Repertory

Meredith Skura, Rice University

W. J. Lawrence argues that the "nocturnal" was an Elizabethan category denoting a play, rustic or urban, with a sequence of confusing night scenes occupying at least one act, usually toward the end. He goes on to claim that he has sound reasons for believing that the nocturnal had special appeal for the rough and ready frequenters of the Rose." This essay explores his claim by considering a group of nocturnals by Admiral's and other companies.